

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 OMB-01 DRC-01 /091 W  
----- 086956

R 200749Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3207

INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON

AMCONSUL MELBOURNE

AMCONSUL SYDNEY

CINCPAC

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, AS

SUBJ: AUSTRALIAN LABOR GOVERNMENT PROBABLY RETURNED BUT WITH  
SLIM MAJORITY

REF: CANBERRA 2971

1. SUMMARY: COUNTING OF BALLOTS IN AUSTRALIAN ELECTIONS  
NOW MORE THAN 80 PERCENT COMPLETE BUT PROCEEDING SLOWLY. ALL  
VOTING BY PAPER BALLOTS (NO MACHINES USED), EACH OF WHICH  
IS SCRUTINIZED BY PARTY REPRESENTATIVES BEFORE BEING  
ADDED TO TOTAL. FINAL RESULT OF HOUSE ELECTIONS WILL NOT  
BE AVAILABLE TILL LATE MAY, AND SENATE RESULTS ONLY IN  
JUNE. EMBASSY BELIEVES LABOR GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE MAJORITY  
OF ONE TO FIVE SEATS IN HOUSE. GOVERNMENT WILL PROBABLY NOT CONTROL  
SENATE. WHITLAM HAS NOT CLAIMED VICTORY BUT HAS STATED LABOR  
RECEIVED HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF VOTES THAN IN 1972 (WE THINK PERCENT-  
AGE WILL BE ABOUT THE SAME). LIBERAL LEADER SNEDDEN HAS NOT CONCEDED  
DEFEAT BUT COMMENTED ELECTION FLASHED AMBER LIGHT TO GOVERNMENT,  
WARINING IT TO GO SLOW. SENATE LIBERAL LEADERS SAY THEY  
WILL CONTINUE TO CONSIDER LEGISLATION ON ITS MERITS,  
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INDICATING THEY WILL OPPOSE IT WHEN NECESSARY. LIBERAL

SENATE LEADER, SENATOR WITHERS, HAS PREDICTED NEW  
GENERAL ELECTIONS IN 12 MONTHS. END SUMMARY.

2. COUNTING OF BALLOTS IN AUSTRALIAN ELECTION CLOSED  
EVENING OF MAY 19 WITH ABOUT 80 PERCENT OF TOTAL COMPLETED.  
COUNTING RESUMED MAY 20 BUT SINCE ALL VOTING IS BY PAPER  
BALLOT (NO RPT NO VOTING MACHINES ARE USED), WITH POLI-  
TICAL PARTY REPRESENTATIVES VERIFYING EACH BALLOT AS IT  
IS COUNTED, PROCESS IS A SLOW ONE. SEEMS CLEAR THAT FINAL  
RESULT OF ELECTION FOR HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WILL NOT  
RPT NOT BE AVAILABLE UNTIL POSTAL VOTE (I. E., ABSENTEE  
BALLOTS) COUNTED AFTER MAY 28. SENATE RESULTS MAY NOT  
BE FINALLY DETERMINED UNTIL SOME TIME IN JUNE, PARTICU-  
LARLY IF THERE ARE CHALLENGES TO OFFICIALLY-DECLARED  
RESULTS. ONLY CERTAINTY TO DATE IS THAT ALL FOUR  
REFERENDUMS HAVE BEEN DEFEATED, THOUGH FINAL COUNT ALSO  
INCOMPLETE.

3. MEANWHILE, OF COURSE, GOVERNMENT GOES ON, WITH WHITLAM  
CABINET IN CARETAKER STATUS. SEEMS CLEAR THAT WHITLAM  
WILL BE RELUCTANT TO TAKE ANY NEW DECISION WHILE ELEC-  
TION RESULTS STILL NOT KNOWN. SEQUENCE OF DEVELOPMENTS  
IN FORMATION OF NEW GOVERNMENT WILL BE PROCLAMATION OF  
FINAL RESULTS IN SENATE AND HOUSE ELECTIONS (PROBABLY  
NOT RPT NOT UNTIL SOME TIME IN JUNE) AND MEETING OF  
LABOR PARLIAMENTARY CAUCUS, WHICH WILL ELECT LABOR  
FRONT BENCH. WE ASSUME ALP WILL HAVE SLIGHT MAJORITY  
OF ONE TO FIVE IN HOUSE OF 127 MEMBERS AND THAT WHITLAM WILL CONTINUE  
AS PRIME MINISTER. WE BELIEVE LABOR WILL NOT RPT NOT  
CONTROL SENATE, THOUGH MARGIN WILL BE NARROW. WHITLAM  
WILL THEN SELECT NEW CABINET AND CONFER WITH GOVERNOR  
GENERAL ON DATE OF CONVOCAION OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTA-  
TIVES (PROBABLY SOME TIME IN LATE JULY FOR BRIEF SESSION,  
WITH BUDGET TO BE PRESENTED IN SEPTEMBER).

4. WHITLAM HAS NOT YET CLAIMED VICTORY. IN STATEMENT  
TO PRESS EVENING OF MAY 19 HE ASSERTED THAT ALP HAD  
SECURED A HIGHER PERCENTAGE OF VOTE THAN IT RECEIVED IN  
1972 BUT THAT QTE PECULIARITIES OF THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM  
END QTE IN SOME STATES HAD PARTLY MUFFLED THE VOICES OF  
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MANY VOTERS. (WE DOUBT LABOR PERCENTAGE HAS INCREASED;  
IT WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE VIRTUALLY IDENTICAL WITH  
49.59 PERCENT LABOR RECEIVED IN 1972.) HE SAID THAT LABOR  
MANDATE OF 1972 HAD BEEN RENEWED INsofar AS ELECTORAL  
SYSTEM ALLOWS AN ACCURATE EXPRESSION OF PEOPLE'S WILL.  
HE CONCLUDED , QTE IF AUSTRALIA IS TO HAVE AN EFFECTIVE  
AND STABLE PARLIAMENTARY DEMOCRACY, THEN ELECTORATES  
MUST URGENTLY BE DISTRIBUTED TO GIVE A MORE ACCURATE

REFLECTION OF THE WISHES OF THE PEOPLE. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT IT SHOULD BE REALIZED AT HOME AND ABROAD THAT WHATEVER THE POSITION OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES IN TERMS OF SEATS MAY BE, ITS POSITION IN THE NATION IS ONE OF STRONG AND CONTINUING SUPPORT. END QTE.

5. NOT SURPRISINGLY, WHITLAM'S VIEWS ON OUTCOME OF ELECTION ARE FAR DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF OPPOSITION. LIBERAL LEADER SNEDDED, WHILE DECLINING TO CONCEDE NARROW LABOR VICTORY, SIMPLY COMMENTED THAT ELECTIONS HAVE FLASHED AMBER LIGHT TO LABOR AND THAT IT SHOULD GO VERY CAREFULLY IN FUTURE. LIBERAL SENATE LEADERS HAVE BEEN MUCH MORE FORTHRIGHT. LIBERAL SENATE LEADER, SENATOR WITHERS, COMMENTED MAY 19, QTE WE WILL CARRY ON AS BEFORE AND EXAMINE EVERYTHING THAT COMES INTO THE SENATE ON ITS MERITS...THE WHOLE THEORY OF A MANDATE IS DEAD, AND IN FACT THE CONSTITUTIONAL ROLE OF THE TWO HOUSES IS DESIGNED TO DENY THE MANDATE THEORY. YOU COULD SAY THAT IF THE LABOR PARTY HAS A MANDATE TO GOVERN, WE HAVE A MANDATE TO OPPOSE. END QTE. DEPUTY LIBERAL LEADER IN SENATE, SENATOR GREENWOOD, SAID MAY 19, QTE I WOULD HAVE THOUGHT THAT WE HAVE BEEN ELECTED WITH A MANDATE EVERY BIT AS STRONG AS MR. WHITLAM'S. THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT WE WILL BE OPPOSING LEGISLATION ON WHICH OUR ATTITUDE IS CLEAR. END QTE

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 OMB-01 DRC-01 /091 W  
----- 087022

R 200749Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3208  
INFO AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON  
AMCONSUL MELBOURNE  
AMCONSUL SYDNEY

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6. WHILE IT IS PREMATURE TO FORECAST ANY SEQUENCE OF EVENTS IN THE ABSENCE OF KNOWING PRECISELY WHAT THE PARTY DIVISION WILL BE IN THE SENATE, BOTH SENATOR WITHERS AND DLP SENATE LEADER, SENATOR MCMANUS (WHO MAY BE RE-ELECTED BUT BY A NARROW MARGIN), HAVE STATED PUBLICLY THEIR VIEW THAT THERE WILL BE NEW GENERAL ELECTIONS WITHIN 12 MONTHS OR SO.

7. EDITORIAL REACTION HAS BEEN SURPRISINGLY UNANIMOUS, WITH AUSTRALIAN OF MAY 20 PERHAPS AS REPRESENTATIVE A SAMPLE AS ANY. IT COMMENTED:

QTE IN THE EVENT, THE VOTERS GAVE MR. WHITLAM HALF A GO-AHEAD, BUT ALSO URGED HIM TO THINK AGAIN. IT IS CLEAR FROM THIS THAT THE ELECTORATE WHICH PUT HIM INTO OFFICE IN 1972 DID SO RATHER IMPULSIVELY. ALTHOUGH HE SAID HE WOULD DO EVERYTHING HE SUBSEQUENTLY ATTEMPTED, MAY PEOPLE SEEMED SURPRISED THAT HE WAS GOING SO FAR, AND THEY WERE ALSO SOMEWHAT TAKEN ABACK BY THE BRASH STYLE IN WHICH HE AND HIS MINISTERS WENT ABOUT IMPLEMENTING THEIR POLICIES. CERTAINLY, THE OPPOSITION WAS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TAKEN ABACK, AND THAT LED IT TO OBSTRUCT MAJOR GOVERNMENT LEGISLATION IN THE SENATE, WHICH IN TURN LED TO THE SHADY RIPOSTE OF THE GAIR AFFAIR, AND THE CLEARLY IMMORAL ACTION OF THE OPPOSITION IN REFUSING SUPPLY. THE UPSHOT IS THAT MR. WHITLAM IS NO LONGER EVEN SEMI-SUPER GOUGH; IF HE REAMINS THE COUNTRY'S CHOICE AS ITS BEST PRIME MINISTER, IT WILL BE BUT ONLY BY A WHISKER. END QTE

8. COMMENT: IN PRESENT UNCERTAINTY GOA WILL PROBABLY FEEL ITSELF UNABLE TO UNDERTAKE ANY NEW INITIATIVES IN EITHER DOMESTIC OR FOREIGN FIELD, AND ONLY ROUTINE BUSINESS CAN BE HANDLED IN NEXT MONTH OR SO. AS TO ELECTIONS THEMSELVES, SEEMS FAIRLY CLEAR THAT LABOR MAINTAINED ITS POSITION IN SYDNEY AND MELBOURNE METROPOLITAN AREAS BUT LOST GROUND HEAVILY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, AS A RESULT OF A SERIES OF GOVERNMENT ACTIONS CONSIDERED DETRIMENTAL TO RURAL INTERESTS. WHITLAM HAS BEEN DAMAGED AS PRIME MINISTER AND EBULLIENT NATIONAL LEADER, FACT WHICH EMERGES CLEARLY FROM GLUM AND SOLEMN EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE IN POST-ELECTION PICTURES CARRIED IN MOST NEWSPAPERS.

9. INFORMAL (INVALID) BALLOTS IN SENATE ELECTIONS WERE NOT AS NUMEROUS AS ANTICIPATED, AVERAGING BETWEEN 5 - 10 PERCENT, OR ABOUT NORMAL FOR SENATE ELECTION. IN ADDITION TO ELECTION OF WOMAN ON LABOR TICKET IN VICTORIA (REFTTEL), MRS. MEAN MELZER ELECTED TO SENATE ON ALP TICKET IN VICTORIA.

10. UNLESS WHITLAM EMERGES FROM SLOW ELECTION COUNT WITH SUFFICIENT MAJORITY IN HOUSE TO GOVERN COMFORTABLY (HE PROBABLY NEEDS AT LEAST MAJORITY OF FIVE FOR THIS, BUT HE MAY NOT GET IT), WHOLE ATMOSPHERE OF POLITICS WILL CHANGE. WHITLAM HIMSELF WILL BE UNABLE TO CONTINUE MAKING NUMEROUS FOREIGN TRIPS, AS HIS OWN VOTE IN HOUSE WILL BE ESSENTIAL TO SURVIVAL OF GOVERNMENT. UNLESS LABOR MAJORITY IN HOUSE AND SENATE IS LARGER THAN COMBINED OPPOSITION VOTE IN BOTH HOUSES, WHITLAM MAY BE UNABLE TO PASS MEASURES BLOCKED BY SENATE IN JOINT SITTING OF BOTH HOUSES AS ENVISAGED IN SECTION 57 OF CONSTITUTION. IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SUCH A CASE, A SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF HIS LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM WILL HAVE TO BE ABANDONED OR AT LEAST POSTPONED UNTIL NEXT ELECTIONS GIVE HIM OPPORTUNITY TO OBTAIN MAJORITY NECESSARY TO ENACT HIS WHOLE PROGRAM. PRESSURE ON LABOR MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT WILL BE HEAVY. THEY CAN ONLY BE ILL OR ABSENT ON URGENT PERSONAL OR OFFICIAL BUSINESS AT RISK OF BRINGING DOWN GOVERNMENT.

11. PERHAPS ONE OF MOST MEMORABLE COMMENTS OF PAST FEW DAYS IS THAT OF LABOR TREASURER, FRANK CREAN, WHO SAID, WITH REFERENCE TO POLLS THAT SEEMED TO FAVOR LABOR LAST WEEK, THAT HE WOULD BE IN FAVOR OF ABOLISHING ALL PUBLIC OPINION POLLS. HIS COMMENT IS NOT MADE SERIOUSLY, OF COURSE, BUT IT REFLECTS SENSE OF STUNNED BEWILDERMENT WHICH APPEARS TO AFFECT LABOR LEADERS AT PRESENT.

12. MISSION WILL FORWARD ITS ANALYSIS OF IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. INTERESTS AND U.S. POLICY IN A FEW DAYS WHEN OUTCOME IS CLEARER.  
GREEN

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## Message Attributes

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**Type:** TE  
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